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24/7 Sobriety Program Profile

Minnehaha County, SD 24/7 Alcohol Monitoring During the Pandemic



In 2020, as COVID-19 began spreading across the U.S., fears of virus transmission hampered the ability of many 24/7 alcohol monitoring programs to safely administer court-mandated breathalyzer tests. Minnehaha County in the southeast corner of South Dakota was no exception.

According to Lieutenant Kurt Schaunaman of Minnehaha County Jail, using staff to administer portable breathalyzer tests (PBTs) to 24/7 participants quickly became a health risk.

“We’ve been running our 24/7 sobriety program since 2004 and we’d typically have 400 people enrolled in alcohol screening,” says Schaunaman. “The court would order the clients to participate in the program, and they would then come into our 24/7 office, fill out some paperwork, and sign their 24/7 agreements. We would then conduct handheld PBTs twice a day with each participant – once between 5:30 and 9:00 a.m. and again between 5:30 and 9:00 p.m. We dedicated two staff members per shift to conduct these tests.”

COVID-19 Risk During PBT Screening

“As COVID became more widespread, we realized that we had to revise our testing methods between our staff and our 24/7 participants. Our testing staff had people blowing into the device as they stood directly in front of them, and there was no way for them to maintain the recommended six feet of space. Who knows where that air was going? And when you’re testing 400 people at a time, the health risk was going to become significant.”

Testing by the 24/7 sobriety program slowed as the virus spread, but Schaunaman was already looking for alternatives to using handheld PBT devices. In September of 2020, Schaunaman invited Precision Kiosk Technologies to present their new alcohol screening technology – the AB Kiosk® system.



“The folks from PKT met with me and the entire jail administration staff, including two lieutenants, the warden, the sheriff, and the chief deputy. In addition, I invited the supervisor of Pre-Trial Services, and the presiding judge for Minnehaha County,” says Schaunaman. “We were looking for a way to streamline the testing process and reduce contact between our staff and clients during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we believed that the AB Kiosk might be a strong solution.”

Freeing Up Staff With The AB Kiosk System

After this meeting, Schaunaman’s team and the County Commission agreed to move forward with the AB Kiosk system, and they installed three units in the lobby of their 24/7 office in early October. A few days later, Schaunaman began twice-daily alcohol screening of a small group of the county’s 24/7 participants, but that group soon expanded to more than 100 people per day as his staff and participants became familiar with the system.

“Our staff really appreciated not having to administer handheld alcohol tests during COVID,” says Schaunaman. “Whereas before we had two people conducting tests full time during each testing period, now the Kiosk was handling everything. This has freed up our staff to focus more attention on other priorities, including monitoring those inmates on a GPS bracelet.

“And our 24/7 participants enjoy using the Kiosk because there is much less waiting time and the testing is much quicker, so they can get in and out. We used to have lines out the door at times when it was busy. Now people move through very quickly, and we never have lines of people waiting to use the Kiosks. In addition, Kiosk users can now pay for their

tests using cash or credit cards directly through the Kiosks. We used to accept only cash, but many of our clients now prefer to pay using their credit cards, so that has been a big help.”

According to Schaunaman, the county is also finding other ways to leverage the AB Kiosk system. “Our pre-trial group is also using the Kiosks to monitor clients before sentencing,” says Schaunaman. “A client comes into our lobby and checks in on the Kiosk. We use the Kiosk to ask them a series of standard questions such as, ‘Has your address or phone number changed? Do you know when your court date is? Have you met with your attorney?’ We can also leave customized messages for certain clients such as, ‘Please contact the officer at the 24/7 desk immediately.’”

Although the initial costs of using the Kiosks were higher than using handheld devices, those costs will fall dramatically as Schaunaman adds more 24/7 clients to the program.

“The 24/7 program is designed to be revenue neutral, and is not designed to make money,” says Schaunaman. “The Kiosk program will be revenue neutral as we bring more clients into Kiosk testing.

“In the future I would like to be able to use the Kiosks for warrants, and we are working with the folks at Precision Kiosk Technologies to add that capability,” says Schaunaman. “For a client that has a non-violent non-felony warrant, I would like him to be able to walk in and pay the required amount of the warrant through the Kiosk. The Kiosk would then issue him a receipt that shows him when and where to appear in court. This would automate the process of paying warrants, establishing a court date, and providing us with a clear record of those transactions.”

The Ability to Test at Any AB Kiosk

Schaunaman will continue to move more and more 24/7 participants onto the Kiosks throughout the COVID pandemic, but that does not mean that his team will go back to using handheld devices once the virus has abated.

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- Lt. Kurt
Schaunaman,
Minnehaha
County Jail

“We are going to continue to use the Kiosks after the pandemic is over because the 24/7 participants enjoy

using it and it is such a big time-saver for our staff. It is really nice not having to have two people assigned to conducting handheld tests twice a day. In addition, once we have someone enrolled in the Kiosk system, they can appear at any other Kiosk and execute their tests at that Kiosk. Someone might have been arrested here, but lives or works in Aberdeen, Brookings, or Minneapolis. The Kiosk lets them test in any jurisdiction, and clients like that freedom. We are also working with them on an interface with our 24/7 software so record keeping will be automatically conducted with the Kiosk into the 24/7 database.

“What makes all of this work is that we have a great relationship with the people at Precision Kiosk Technologies. Whenever we have an issue with a Kiosk, they’d be on it right away - showing up the next day to fix it. And they always want to know how they can improve the Kiosk or add new capabilities to make our work easier. They’ve been phenomenal.”

About Precision Kiosk Technologies

Minneapolis-based Precision Kiosk Technologies (PKT) provides automated high-volume probation monitoring and alcohol screening to law enforcement and courts. The company’s AB Kiosk® reduces the administrative burden of alcohol screening and other court-mandated programs, including probation check-ins, cashless bail, Huber work release, and pre- and post-trial services. The company has 36 AB Kiosks deployed across the U.S., including seven that are providing automated alcohol screening to 24/7 Sobriety Programs in South Dakota. To learn more about the AB Kiosk system, please visit www.abkiosk.com.



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